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Whistler

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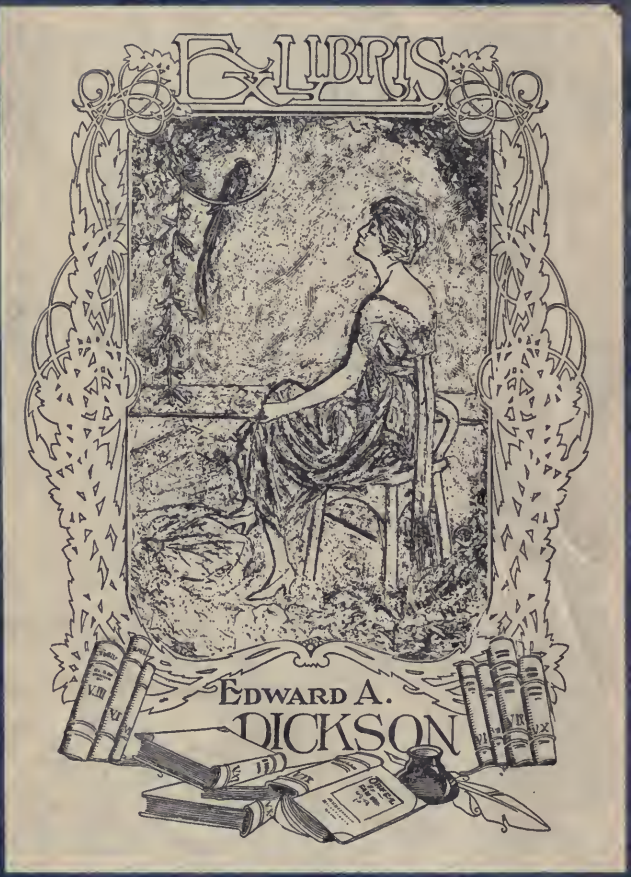
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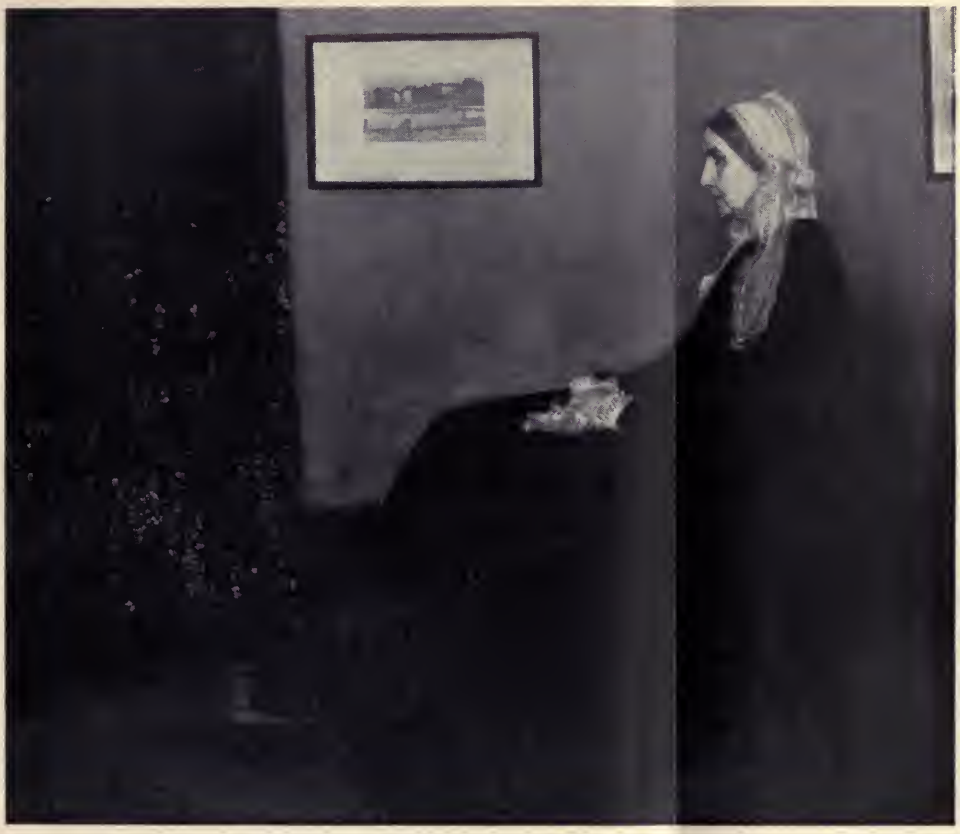
WHISTLER'S ART MASTERPIECE



"Portrait of the Artist's Mother"

Whistler's "Portrait of the Artist's Mother"—the first painting by an American artist ever placed in the Louvre, and generally regarded as the most famous of all American paintings—is now on a visit to this country, as a loan from the French government. Los Angeles is one of the fortunate few cities granted the privilege of being host to this world-celebrated art masterpiece.

Now rated as one of the art treasures of the French nation, Whistler's "Mother" had a long and stubborn fight for recognition. Painted in 1871, it was refused when first offered for exhibition at the Royal Academy in London in 1872. There was a storm of protest against it, and it was denounced by one distinguished critic as "ignoring all accepted canons of good drawing, good color and good painting".

In the window of a dealer's gallery in Paris in 1889, it caught the eye of Georges Clemenceau. It was on sale for $400. He interested the French government, and two years later it was purchased, and hung in the Luxemburg Museum. Today the famous portrait is insured for $600,000. In 1926 the painting took its rightful place among the great art works of all time in the Louvre.

Commenting upon the famous portrait, one well-known art authority says:

"As we look upon the simple dignity of this canvas, it is hard to realize that it was ever the subject of heated controversy.

"It is a type known to us all . . . the type of serene age. The frail shoulders, the head somewhat too heavy for the relaxed muscles and drooping a little forward, the delicate hands clasped quietly over the thin handkerchief; the smooth hair, the daintiness of the lace cap, the farseeing eyes that seem to look into the past, all combine to make a lovable impression on the mind before the eye has distinguished the subtle division of the spaces, the distribution of the masses, the placing of the accents, the grave beauty of the values in the shadowy wall and the black dress, the decorative charm of the dark curtain with its intricate pattern."

As Thomas C. Howe, Jr. points out, "it is interesting to note that the picture which hangs on the wall beside the curtain is Whistler's well-known etching "Black Lion Wharf, Wapping", from "The Thames Set" dated 1859. On the curtain itself appears the Butterfly monogram with which Whistler from the early sixties to the end of his life, chose to sign most of his paintings and etchings.

James Abbott McNeill Whistler was the most cosmopolitan of all American painters. He was born in Lowell, Mass., in 1834, spent his youth in Russia and returned to this country as a young man. His father was an army officer, and young Whistler entered West Point—from which he was discharged in his third year for "deficiency in chemistry". He made some sketches during his West Point days, one or two of which have been preserved. When he was 21 he went to Paris, and did not return to this country. He studied with Gleyre in Paris and for a time fell under the influence of Courbet; but his greatest influences were Velasquez and the Japanese. Whistler exerted great influence upon the 19th century painting, especially in England. His death occurred in London in 1903.

Whistler painted the "Mother" about the time that he completed also the "Portrait of Carlyle" and "Miss Alexander". These three paintings are considered the best of all his portraits.

An interesting episode in his life was his quarrel with the great art critic, John Ruskin. Ruskin ridiculed Whistler, and Whistler retaliated by suing his critic for libel; he was awarded damages of one farthing.

Whistler sought for the psychological motive of expression, and he felt the symbolic supremacy of the old Byzantine art, which, like the Japanese art, is Symbolical.

From Velasquez he learned the dignity of line and the luminosity of light, and from Rossetti the poetry of restraint—and from his own genius that, "if painting in the future is to hold its own alongside of developments of modern music, it can only do so by finding its motive in the abstract." Again—"Paintings may tell a story or no, but they must sing a song!"

Whistler's pen was as vivid as his brush. Exquisitely poetic and musical are his written thoughts. The following is one of his delightful and characteristic word-pictures: **"And when the evening clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and fairyland is before us—then the wayfarer hastens home."**

So, "these various strands of motive he wove into the warp of his own creation and the result was a fabric which had the faded splendor of old Gobelin tapestry".

In Whistler's art we have a glimpse into the "tranquil half-light of the soul, where one may ponder upon the things of the Spirit."

The painting was secured for Los Angeles by the Museum Patrons' Association, and through the courtesy of the Board of Governors and the Director of the Los Angeles Museum, it will be on public display for a brief period at the Museum in Exposition Park.

Los Angeles is indebted to the Museum of Modern Art of New York for aiding it in being selected as one of the host cities.

Museum Patrons' Association

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SPIRIT OF THE AGE
SERIES NO I. WHISTLER
BY HALDANE MACFALL

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LA PRINCESSE DU PAYS DE LA PORCELAINE

WHISTLER

BUTTERFLY, WASP, WIT
MASTER OF THE ARTS
ENIGMA

BY

HALDANE MACFALL

AUTHOR OF
"THE MASTERFOLK," ETC.

JOHN W. LUCE & CO.
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frontispiece

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page twenty-four

THE FUR JACKET
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THE THAMES IN ICE
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page forty-eight

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SPIRIT OF THE AGE SERIES

The publishers desire to announce that it is their purpose to comprise in this series a collection of little books uniform in general style and appearance to the present volume and having for their subjects men and women, whose work and influence, in whatever field of literature or art was their chosen one, may be said to faintly reflect the spirit or tendencies of cultivated thought at the present time.

The treatment of the subject matter will not be conventional, the chief aim being to present to the readers a living, marching personality breathing with the individuality characteristic of the person.

Volume I of this series is Whistler
by Haldane Macfall

Volume II, Robert Louis Stevenson
by Eve Blantyre Simpson

Additional volumes to be announced shortly.

THE MAN

"Ha, ha! amazing!"

He flits across the Victorian years—gay, debonair, laughing, quarrelsome, huffy—a dandified exquisite of a man, insolent, charming, unexpected—a wit amongst the chiefest wits—and he drew his rapier upon them all! hidalgic, swaggering; blithely stepping into frays for mere love of a quip; like one of those tempestuous Spaniard dons of his beloved Velasquez, hot upon his honour always, just to keep his blood jigging. Strutting it like gamecock, he fought his duel; drew blood; and, almost before his blade was wiped, had forgotten his

man and, with flashing eyeglass in choleric eye, was peering for another.

And it was behind this so mocking fantastic figure, which he whimsically created and set up, and almost came to believe in, to trick the herd of men, that he strove to hide the wounds he suffered from the dull unseeing eyes and clownish malice of his stupid day. For, mark you! behind that quaint screen there wrought and toiled, in splendid labour, the sensitive soul of one of the greatest artists of which the English race has been delivered.

He knew it.

The suffering that comes to a man of genius, who is giving of his magnificence to a blind generation, was his. And with the bitterness of years of hate

and obloquy in his heart, and stung by the injustice of it all, he grasped that what the world would not see he could whip it into seeing—so he whipped it—with flout and knout and jeer and sneer and caustic jibe he whipped it, until its unwieldy bulk became first uneasy, then wholly perplexed, then tolerant—then forgave itself—then recognised him and paid him cautious homage, admiring first his truculent audacities, discovering only his greatnesses after fearsomely bowing to his small disdains.

So he smiled away the agonies, playing the fop, with flashing eyeglass and long cane and flat-brimmed silk hat and the long glove and devil-may-care laugh; and, except from a few, hid as best he might the great soul that

was in him. All that was great in him he spent in the eager agony of artistic endeavour. The rest of his day he played at play-acting in a fantastic farce, dressing up in theatre attire, and thrusting before the footlights the dandified, quarrelsome little figure that strutted it with bigod airiness, making even of nature's defect, the white forelock amidst his black hair, a source of pride—moving in a whirl of mockeries, acid witticisms, and rough and stinging repartee, reckless of consequence except the answering laugh, reckless of friendships broken. He essays to play the part of Butterfly—the gorgeous wings but thinly veil the venomous body of Wasp. He did not wholly deceive himself—the butterfly that was his

pictured signature he often drew with sting for tail.

But, be it remembered, this man, by nature affectionate, blithe, and happy, was made to fight his way for every leaf of his bays. He came armed to the business without the plain man's limitations—or he had fallen. And, as though his wayfaring were not thorny enough, he himself set up barries across his path the surmounting of which at times came near to tragedy. He tried to despise the good opinion of the world; and he came near to breaking his heart in the effort to prevent the world from taking him at his word and ignoring him.

He was of the breed of the conquerors. He had to discover to the world a new world. As must all who would reach to

majesty and dominion, he had to break the table of the laws. He took the risks—if he had failed, he had had to pay. But whilst he stooped he conquered. He was a great man with many faults. So be it. And, when all's said, what is the sum of his littlenesses against his magnificence?

Yes, he stooped—on occasion. Endowed with supreme gifts, he would spend precious hours of his working day in attacking critics, sometimes friends, for stupidities or unmeant slights. To this end he would cudgel his keen wits to pen the spontaneous epigram, or to find a victim for a ready-made slur. He would belabour the Royal Academy for its neglect of him, protesting the while that he did not desire its favours. He pro-

tested so much that he had no wounds, he but drew the attention to the hiding of wounds—he, who was high above any honour that the Royal Academy could give, and, to its eternal shame, was too petty to honour itself by the giving! . . .

He stepped into the Victorian years out of some old-world tangle, some old romantic brawl, unreasonable, quixotic. He is of the blood of the dictators. He must never be in the wrong. He ruffles it, dapper, fire-eating, striking insults with his cane across offending shoulders, calling men out to duel—and in whimsical aside, tongue in cheek, hopes to God they may not come out. He threatens to compel the man who desires his friendship to purge his visiting list of all such of whom

he shall disapprove, blind to the simple fact that he himself would be the first to shun so scurvy a fellow.

He is a rollicking law to himself, whether in the country taking his walks abroad in dancing-shoes, or climbing rocks by the seashore in the same—whether in town posing and strutting by the hour before the mirror at the tailor's or the hairdresser's.

He is a very strategist. He detests the vulgarities. If possible, the rude personal scuffle is to be avoided. But war must be. He has the genius for war. If it has to be the personal scuffle, fearless but small, he does not give battle until the more powerful enemy is at disadvantage—then darts in and flings the clumsy fellow, taken

unawares, through the plate-glass window in Piccadilly. He sets his wits against the other's strength. And before the other has recovered from the fierce surprise of the first onslaught, Whistler has skipped into the public eye, and is crowing over his victory.

The most mischievous of sprites, he detested war as an unmitigated horror and unclean. He hated sport—adhorred killing. Up with the lark—ever blithe—he was an early riser, a tireless worker, the man of taste in all the things that he did. He lived delicately on slender fare; was temperate with wine, of which he was an exquisite judge. He is the dandy always, dressed even at his work as though ready to enter the drawing-room of fashion.

His day's work done, he sallies out to dine with the wits. With friends he spends his evening at the playhouse—Shakespeare's or other serious play a huge joke to him—the comic song of the music-hall a joy. He has no sense of music.

Intellectual pursuits are not for him. He has few books—reads fewer. Religion troubles him little. His day's work shed from him, he must enjoy life—know men through contact with their wit and gossip.

He is always fresh, always bright, never weary. He was never heard to utter an indecent phrase—he detested all uncleanness.

He is vague in affairs of money; and his difficulties at times are pathetic. He loves his work—to part with the work of his

hands is an agony—it is the drawing of blood. He refuses an etching to a dealer for a guinea—gives it to a poor admirer for a crown.

He makes excuse to get back a picture from its owner. For years the distressed owner appeals for it. Preposterous! cries Whistler—for ten whole years she has had the privilege of living with this masterpiece, and now she has the presumption to want it back again!

He is full of life's energy. Never lounges in an armchair. His home contains no comfortable furniture. "If you want comfort," cries he, laughing—"go to bed." Prefers Adam's chairs! And his evening's gadding over, he walks home, making of his exercise an opportunity to study the beauty of the night—when

fools are abed.

A constant lover, a loyal husband, a devoted son.

The tales of his tenderness to children discover in him something of the heroic essence.

We listen to the gossip of his ill-humours until—suddenly—we realise that this is small talk, the gossip of the backstairs; that there was something larger and deeper and richer than the spitfire that darts through the pages of *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*. There is that in the reservations of the man which makes us suspect the truth of the one and only picture that Whistler wrought blunderingly—part Butterfly, part Wasp, wholly laughing Enigma.

Behind the cloak of this truculent flippancies, there was concealed within the vindictive

poses of the fragile body a giant of stature—a large-souled, silent, self-reliant, dignified, deep-hearted man.

Kindness opened the heart of this man and showed how tender a flower dwelt therein, how thin was the husk of his asperities.

Only God's aristocracy are crucified. It is often a pathetic part of the awful tragedy that the agony of the sacrifice is, to an extent, the work of their own hands.

HIS CAREER

11 *July* 1834: 17 *July* 1903

In the Gospel of St. Patrick to the Irish it is written: Whensoever you shall see a head, for the love of God hit it.

James Abbott M'Neill Whistler came of Anglo-Irish forefathers, settled in America for a couple of generations. Major John Whistler, the emigrating grandfather, was an Irishman of good family. Major George Washington Whistler, the father, married, as his second wife, Anna Matilda M'Neill, of the old Southern aristocracy of Baltimore. To them was born at Lowell in Massachusetts, on the eleventh day of July 1834,

the child who was to make the name of Whistler famous.

When the boy was nine, his father, an engineer, was called to Russia to the making of railways. And thither, to St. Petersburg, went the family. At his father's death, the lad being fifteen, the widowed mother returned to America with her sons—the devotion of the mother and son is one of the sweetest passages in Whistler's stormy life. At seventeen, the youth entered the West Point Military Academy as a cadet; but he appears to have shown little liking for his career thereat; and it must have been with the breath of relief that he gave up the soldier's calling and found himself free to give his whole strength and feverish energy to the art to which he

CARLYLE

was destined to bring such rare distinction. He left his native land at twenty, and never again set foot on it.

With enthusiastic delight, he turned his face towards the art-student's life in France, and—taking England on his way—he being now twenty-one, settled in Paris in 1855, entering for two years the studio of Marc Gleyre, a romantic painter of mediocre talent, having for comrades in his studentship the stimulating personalities of Degas, Alphonse Legros, Fantin-Latour, DuMaurier. But there was a more potent master in Paris at whose studio the young Whistler worked, together with Manet, a young Frenchman of genius—the ghost of Velasquez was risen from the dead, and his majestic spirit was abroad.

Light-hearted and boisterous, his pranks the talk of the quarter, it was during these three years of studentship in Paris, nevertheless, that the young fellow etched "The Little French Set," published in his twenty-fourth year.

When, at twenty-five, he came to settle down in London, with his brother-in-law, Seymour Haden, the surgeon whose high artistic achievement in etching won him knighthood, he sent his first contribution, two Thames etchings, to the walls of the Royal Academy. We find him soon after sharing a studio with DeMaurier in Newman Street; then, painting and etching at Wapping; about the end of the year he settled in Chelsea. Whistler was always jealous of any place he usurped;

and amusing stories are told of the serious anger with which he would order other artists to begone from his realm.

The following year, the beginning of the 'sixties, saw his first painting at the Royal Academy, "At the Piano." It was bought by that rare artist and stout champion of Velasquez, John Phillip, R. A.—"Phillip of Spain" as his nickname had it—a passionate admirer of Butterfly from the start. For several years Whistler is to be seen in painting and etching on the walls of the Royal Academy—"The Thames in Ice" was shown in 1862. It was from France, Paris, from the heaven to which all good Americans go when they die, that he received his first great rebuff. In 1863, Whistler being on the edge of

thirty, his "White Girl" was rejected by the Salon. Hung at the indignation collection of the "Salon des Refusés," it was one of the sensations and enthusiasms of the year amongst the younger men; and the success of this act of rebellion probably taught Whistler, always combative, the great value of the stir caused by attacking critics and buffeting the authorities in the face. His first rebuff was his first high success. It has been wittily said of Whistler that, should he be denied entrance to heaven, he was not of the mean spirits that would go lower down—he would set up a splendid heaven of his own opposite to Peter's gate, and the trouble would be that all the best people would go there.

His thirty-second and thirty-third years saw Whistler at Valparaiso, the source of inspiration of some of his most superb seascapes.

It was the splendid moment of his career.

This change of scene, or some increasing self-revelation of his genius, seems to have made a marvellous impression upon the man. It was in this thirty-third year that he drew completely away from tradition and the achievement of his own and former ages—it was in this year that he found himself. His hand becomes bolder; his spirit frees itself from the ages; he rises above the schooling of tradition; and his confidence is justified and supreme. The superb "Nocturne in Blue and Gold—Valparaiso" is the rev-

elation of the mastery of an original and consummate genius. It is the perfect thing. The pupil of Velasquez has thrown off the splendid tyranny of his master, and stands revealed a giant amongst men. He uses colour with an emotional exquisiteness and sense that no man has ever approached. His creative faculty bathes itself in the sheer joy of emotional achievement. Beauty of statement, ease of statement, have become a confirmed habit. He has come into a kingdom undreamed of even by Velasquez; and he braces himself to his sovereignty; disciplines himself for its high governance. It is the ecstatic moment in which he takes the mystic sacraments of coronation. He knows that the sceptre of em-

pire over a kingdom of the imagination is given into his hand; and, with the candour of the conqueror, he accepts it, knowing the power that is behind his throne; knowing, too, that his life must be the keen-eyed fight of the usurper to keep that throne. . . .

He came back to Chelsea, and from her banks painted masterpiece after masterpiece in a series of poetic Thames river-pieces.

But there is now a wondrous mystic music in his utterance that the world has never before heard—a beauty of statement that the world has never before seen. Some magic has fallen upon the vision of the man; and his skill of hand leaps eagerly to express the poetry that is in him. From now his

craftsmanship states emotionally every impression that he desires to express. What has rent the veil and yielded him the mysteries, he himself, maybe, could not have put into precise words, mayhap did not fully realise in terms; the significant fact that remains that he felt it, and his hand's skill could by its wizardry execute it.

Two factors seem to have influenced the splendid revelation. His eyes were become opened to the beauty of craftsmanship of the painters of Japan, and to the close affinity and the oneness of the law of colour with those of music. And he took these twain revelations from Japan and from music, dissolved into them the revelation of Velasquez, and

created the beauty of craftsmanship which makes him one of the painters of the world. . .

In place of palette, Whistler always used a large polished table, set in the full light of the window. In the middle of this he mixed a great patch of the colour he decided should be the key to his scheme, and into this he dragged each colour of his gamut as he used it.

He painted his picture so that the object appeared bathed in the same depth of atmosphere within the frame as the object was bathed in from the eye. In doing so he set himself the most difficult task in painting; and his triumph was complete. Commencing on a neutral grey ground, he sketched in his scheme in black as a decorative whole, and thenceforth painted

over the whole canvas at every painting, so that at each stage the picture was advanced as a complete whole up to that stage. He never painted in patches. He required many sittings.

In his early work, his paint was thick, bold, vigorous. As his powers increased, he began to paint in his final manner, with the paint very liquid and flowing, in a very full brush, using as medium turpentine and linseed oil, and making the ground show under the brushing, and both ground and brushing assist the colour. The stroke of the brush he never softened away or toned down, but used it with directness and firmness, that gave an added quality of its own to the enhancement of his workmanship. In painting

flowers or the like, the simplicity and boldness of the thing, as a whole, are almost like the broad touches on Oriental China.

He held truly that it is the province of art to interpret—not to imitate.

He respected the relation of the tool's work to the size of the picture as much as to its subject: and rightly condemned the use of an etching needle on a large surface. In large paintings he used large brushes.

In oils he made constant use of black with all his colour—in water-colours he did the same with Chinese white.

Whistler was so impressed by his discovery of the music that is in colour, that he used, for the first time, as title to his next Academy picture, the phrasing

which denoted the key of his colour scheme. He gave as his reason that Beethoven and the masters of music had so done. As a matter of fact, every artist paints to a harmony of colour—and in calling the resulting work by the title of his colour scheme, as musicians often do, confusingly enough, with their schemes of sound, he but states the aim of his craftsmanship and leaves his artistic aim to be guessed. He gains nothing—he gives a title difficult to remember and of little distinction—and he adds no virtue to his work. For, if it come to that, he only says in words what his beauty of craft should utter for itself.

However, at thirty-three years, he sent to the Royal Academy the painting "Symphony in

White—No. 3"; and in the doing, raised the first noisy clatter that brought him into general public notice. Hamerton made his fatuously famous remark about the "Symphony in White" not being "precisely a symphony in white," owing to other colours being employed. But he delivered his dazed wits into the hands of the most trenchant scoffer of his day. Whistler wrote the now famous lines of the masterly criticism: "And does he, in his astounding consequence, believe that a symphony in F contains no other note, but shall be a continued repetition of F F F? . . . . Fool!"

The beautiful canvasses under Japanese influence quickly followed: "La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine"; "Die Lange Lei-

zen—of the Six Marks"; "The Golden Screen"; "The Little White Girl," one of the most perfect and most masterly canvasses he ever painted; and "The Balcony."

He was in his thirty-eighth year when his famed Portrait of his Mother was hung at the Royal Academy after a stormy scene, so scandal wags the tongue, in which it would have been rejected but for the threat of Sir William Boxall to resign. It is a strange comment on Whistler's oft-repeated law that only artists could judge the work of artists! His worst rebuffs came from artists. Surely the pathos, the dignity, the resignation, and the sweetness of the old age of gentlewomanhood have never been more perfectly set down than on this immortal

canvas! Every beautiful quality of a master hand, colour, form, line, mass, arrangement, elusiveness, mystery, all seem to have conspired together to utter it.

In after years the French nation secured this great canvas for the Luxembourg. It is difficult to know why Whistler let it go to the land of his heaviest rebuffs. It was outside all suggestion that Whistler would even think of parting with so beloved a thing as long as he had life. It went to France for a paltry hundred and sixty pounds. But all this was not as yet.

In his fortieth year, Whistler held his first exhibition of works in Pall Mall, and for the first time the world saw his "Carlyle," and the great child-portrait of "Miss Alexander."

The portrait of "Miss Alexander" is unquestionably the supreme portrait of young girlhood wrought by human hands. The subtle atmosphere of her age is caught with that power of emotional statement that raised Whistler to the heights—a purity and beauty of statement that is not surpassed even by the painting of the air in which the dainty figure stands with the awkward grace of her years. The whole thing melts and moves. The sweetness and tenderness of the colours, the exquisite beauty of the brushwork, the richness of tone in the greys—he has ranged the whole gamut of the painter's craft to create a sensitive emotional statement of life that lives for ever in the memory.

In the "Carlyle" the country

THE FUR JACKET

possesses a cherished masterpiece of the first rank through the good taste of a city that is a very home and nursery of art—Glasgow. This was the first picture that brought the artist a thousand pounds. And it does the city fathers eternal credit that they turned a deaf ear to the ratepayers who, suffering from Ruskinitis, raised a storm of protest against the squandering of public money upon it. Whistler's versatility is no less remarkable than his right instinct for style in the use of the sombre greys in this great canvas which seems to suggest and by emotional sympathy of tone to tell of the philosophic brooding and the grim old age of one of the greatest masters of the English tongue.

In 1877, at forty-three, Butterfly was to arouse the petulant ill-will of a far greater man than Hamerton. At the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery, Whistler showed his "Irving as Philip the Second of Spain," and a number of "Nocturnes" and other pieces. Ruskin was now the despot of the art world. In art, Ruskin was clouding the national intellect; and his high literary genius was enabling him to pass base coin, when, in an evil moment for himself, he turned peevish unseeing eyes upon the master-work of Whistler, and uttered the now notorious drivel that he wrote down in pompous, solemn fashion enough in *Fors Clavigera:* "For Mr. Whistler's own sake, no less than for the protection of the purchaser, Sir

Coutts Lindsay ought not to have admitted works into the gallery in which the ill-educated conceit of the artist so nearly approached the aspect of wilful imposture. I have seen, and heard, much of Cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face."

The injustice and the sin of this thing were insane, almost criminal. A weaker man than Whistler must have been utterly destroyed by it—ruined, body and soul. But Ruskin had delivered himself, naked, into the hands of the spoiler. He never spoke again with the same authority. . . . Whistler sued him for libel; and the doings of those two dark November

days when the case came before Baron Huddleston and a special jury, became the laughter of the whole country. It was a duel between him and the Attorney-General, with Whistler's brilliant wit and passionate belief in his art for seconds on the one side, and the pompous playfulness and self-satisfaction of the legal luminary screening his ignorance and trying to make a case out of what he did not understand on the other. The Attorney-General walloped the air with a sandbag, hitting his own nose, perspiring and inanely jocund, slowly realising at last that the keen rapier play of his enemy was shedding his blood and brains all about the cockpit.

It was at this trial that, stupidly

badgered by the Attorney-General as to whether he asked two hundred guineas for the labour of two days, Whistler made his now famous reply: "No—I ask it for the knowledge of a lifetime." And later on, when asked by the Attorney-General: "Do you think that you could make *me* see the beauty of that picture?" Whistler paused, examined the Attorney-General's face, looked at the picture, and, after much thought, the Court waiting in silence for his answer, said: "No, I fear it would be as hopeless as for the musician to pour his notes into the ears of a deaf man.". . His farthing damages made him the best talked-about man in the country for many a day, and his pictures advanced in the favour of many who, whilst

they could not fully appreciate his art, admired his courage and his wit.

Whistler, when he wore that farthing on his watch-chain for trophy, knew full well the value of that trial to him—realised full well the blow it dealt to Ruskin, which a public subscription to pay that gentleman's costs was unable to mitigate. . . .

Out of this devilry, emerged the first of those brown-paper pamphlets, *Whistler v. Ruskin—Art and Art Critics*, in which his caustic wit was to find a quaint means of utterance in marginal notes and "reflections," such as the delicious personality concerning Frith, who had given evidence against him at the Ruskin trial: "It was just a toss up whether I became an artist or an auctioneer," says W. P.

Frith, R. A. To which Whistler tacks the reflection, "He must have tossed up.". . .

The following year (1879), which saw his paintings of "Rosa Corder" and "Connie Gilchrist Dancing," at the Grosvenor Gallery, he went to Venice, and for nearly two years wrought upon the now famous and exquisite Venetian series of etchings. He showed at the Grosvenor Gallery numerous paintings—nocturnes and marines— in 1882 the "Lady Meux," in 1884 the "Lady Colin Campbell."

The year 1884 was a memorable one for Whistler. He was elected, at the age of fifty, a member of the Royal Society of British Artists in Suffolk Street: an event that was to lead to another of those storms

which helped, far more than his pictures, to build up his reputation in the country. There was threat of whirlwind in Suffolk Street from the beginning. . . .

The next year he delivered to crowded houses in London, Oxford, and Cambridge his lecture *Ten o' Clock*, in which he gave expression to his theories on art, and discovered himself a poetic and exquisite writer of English prose. It caused a profound sensation.

This was the year he showed his "Sarasate" in Suffolk Street. The last day of the year was enlivened with Whistler's letter to *The World* about the celebrated Peacock Room which Whistler had decorated for Mr. Leyland, whose daughter Mr. Val Prinsep, R. A., had mar-

THE THAMES IN ICE

ried. When the beautiful "La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine" was set up in the Peacock Room as its key note, the red of the valuable gilt Spanish leather upon the walls was found to be out of tone with its colours. Whistler persuaded Mr. Leyland to go to his country house; and, with an assistant, set to work feverishly to paint out the valuable leather with peacock-blue and gold. The owner returned to his house to find that Whistler was painting out the whole thousand pounds' worth of leather. Leyland angrily told him that his thousand guineas fee should be reduced to pounds. Whistler insisted on finishing the room. Rid of Leyland, our Butterfly painted upon one of the walls two peacocks, one

smothered in a shower of shillings, the other prancing in triumph. The room finished, Whistler sent out invitations broadcast to a private view, and Leyland departed from his house until it was over! . . . The quarrel became very bitter.

But there were more stirring events abroad for Whistler. His personality and his reputation had brought distinction to the Royal Society of British Artists; the sleepy place had roused to the new ferment, to the footfall of crowds, to find itself famous, sought after—the Latest Thing. He was elected President. Whistler roused the younger bloods with his overwhelming energy. The place blossomed into new life. The man's sharp eyes were everywhere — Whistler always

wrought his masterpieces as a whole. The very signboard, with its dreadful blue enamel ground and commonplace commercial white lettering, he made into a thing of beauty, with his own restless hand painting over it a red ground with gold lettering, and placing upon it the now notorious golden lion and butterfly. In the butterfly his enemies smelt frank tyranny—they would have back sleep and the blue enamel of commerce rather. There were mutterings. In 1887, Whistler published his first collection of lithographs, upon which he had been engaged since he was forty-four; the stone was in great favour with him.

Then broke the storm in Suffolk Street; then was fought the battle of the Signboard. Whist-

ler had found the society a mere doormat for the Academy—it had become subservient to it by consequence. He tried to raise the society to independence. He stopped the plastering of its walls with mediocre work and the trash of the studios, whilst the members sent their best work to the Academy. Now, for some years its annual sales had gone up a thousand a year. At his election they stood at £8000. They began to come down with a run. The older members, irritated by Whistler's domineering ways, utterly baffled and bewildered by his art, and, above all, frightened at the decline of their sales, compelled his resignation in 1888, settling into stolid jogtrot again under Sir Wyke Bayliss. The younger

men of promise seceded with Whistler, or, as he wittily put it, "the Artists have come out and the British remain."....
There was some washing of dirty linen. Rid of Whistler, the triumphant opposition cleansed the place of all stain of the tyrant—from the sign-board was blotted the baneful butterfly, the golden lion was painted black.
In this the year of his abdication, he published *Ten o' Clock;* and the last year of the 'eighties saw him elected to the Royal Academy of Munich.
The 'nineties opened with something of a roar for Whistler. He had collected, and now, in his fifty-sixth year, published in book form, with his characteristic brown-paper boards and dainty gold lettering for cover,

as *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, the more brilliant, caustic, and witty of the letters which he delighted to write to the press in answer to critics, setting amidst them the very fine prose work, "*Ten o' Clock*," together with a bitingly satirical and whimsically annotated edition of the Ruskin trial, making much comical use of the marginal comment. The book had a wide vogue—it tickled a large public to whom his high achievement in art was Greek or boredom—the human always turns aside from the more serious business of life to watch a dog-fight. It did more—it established Whistler as a brilliant writer of prose; and it set up such nervous dread amongst the critics that from the day of its appearance

he became immune from attack. Listen to this:

"And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and fairy-land is before us—then the wayfarer hastens home; the working man and the cultured one, the wise man and the one of pleasure, cease to understand, as they have ceased to see; and Nature, who, for once, has sung in tune, sings her exquisite song to the artist alone, her son and her master—her son in that he loves her, her master in that he knows her."

But the bulk of the book is the

record of his quarrels; and such things are best forgot at setting of the sun. Whistler played catch-as-catch-can with an open razor. For when all's said, and the face draws serious after the laugh, we become aware that he has set up as picture of himself an acrid-witted and somewhat unlovely figure which was scarce even the half-truth of the man, but which was straightway accepted as his whole confession. The charm and fascination of the man, his tenderness, as in the case of the broken artist Holloway as he lay dying in want and penury—these things do not make the ghost of an appearance. Whistler himself felt this sense of blight. At that great May-Day banquet of his life, when England rendered him homage,

there is something terribly pathetic in the sight of this man of genius, at the topmost summit of his achievement, of worldwide repute, fifty-five years of his stormy life behind him and the battle won, rising with friendly faces greeting him, and making his great public confession that he had had to "wrap himself in a species of misunderstanding, as the traveller of the fable drew closer about him the folds of his cloak the more bitterly the storm assailed him on the way." Facing the sorry hours and the vanished disdains of his pilgrimage, he revealed the larger emotions of his manhood. Whistler had a soul that soared high above the froth of mere epigram. It is not in his book, but in his art that you shall

find him.

A year or two before he was sixty, he brought together the famous show of 1892 at Goupil's Galleries, "Nocturnes, Marines, and Chevalet pieces." His reputation and his position were now secure, and the world of taste flocked to render homage. Such as could not feel the artistic emotion of his work kept silence — afraid to be thought dullards. His contempt had now the furnace-blast to wither reputations. Insincerity in praise was become as widespread as afore-time was fatuity in blame.

From this time to the very end, he produced good work, but the flame burns less hotly. He was a born fighter—mark the uptilt of the pugnacious nose; but there was now nobody to

fight—no giant to slay. Peace had settled upon his kingdom. He slowly died of it.

Whistler went abroad and, roaming through Brittany, drifted to Paris, taking a studio in the Rue du Bac.

His sixty-first year saw him back in England again. The winter gave London the chance of seeing his lithographs. The next year he was settled in London again; and he published his masterly lithographs of the Thames—many done from the Savoy Hotel, where his wife lay ill.

But the year held tragedy for him. His wife, the widow of the architect Godwin, and a woman of considerable artistic talent herself, died, and left Whistler a sad and lonely man. He had married late in life;

and the marriage had been a very happy one. In her death he lost his chiefest comrade. He never wholly recovered from the blow. His intimate friends, the Pennells, William Heinemann, and others, came the closer to him; and his admirers amongst the artists gathered to his standard. In 1898 Francis Howard conceived the plan of, and founded, the society which is the most vigorous artistic body in this country to-day—the International Society of Sculptors, Painters, and Gravers—and at sixty-four Whistler was made its first President.

But the great fight was done. Whistler brought honour to several foreign societies, by becoming a member; and they will point with pride in the

years to come to their distinction. But the man himself was above all honours offered by academies—his high achievement is the patent of his nobility, his claim to immortality.

In 1899 he tried to repeat his success of *The Gentle Art* with his pamphlet of *The Baronet and the Butterfly;* but he broke the butterfly on a rather clumsy wheel. His quarrel with Sir William Eden about his wife's portrait was too parochial to stir the public pulse. It was the slayer of lions condescending to the rat-hunt. There was a sense of stooping. The old war-dog was growling at shadows—seeing ghosts in the twilight of life. His hand's skill never left him. He was working to the last.

In the spring and early summer

of 1903 he was slowly failing—but he died rather suddenly on the seventeenth day of July, in the beginning of his seventieth year.

Without honour in his own country, Whistler did not hesitate to fling a jibe at the "British" of whose blood he was; and amongst whom he had honour when honour elsewhere he had none. But he was a Londoner to the bone.

When the coming generations go a pilgrimage to Whistler's shrine, it is to England, to London, that they will come. In London he made his home; in London he won to honour and to fame; in London he fought the splendid battle of his life like some strutting dandy of an antique day; London he wove into his splendid dreams; and it was

to London that he came to die. He was of the British blood; and he won home to the home of his people. All the world may claim him; but his heart was in London—and lies buried in London.

And, in the drizzle of that July day, as the silent body of that once so vital spirit, covered now in its purple pall, passed along the dingy highway of his beloved Chelsea, with scent of many flowers, to its last resting-place, it seemed but right that he should sleep in London town.

THAT WHICH HE SPOKE.

The crest of the Whistlers is a harp of gold, stringed with black strings.

All that this man's pen wrote was uttered with a sense of style that was golden, but its music was sombre with the black asperities of one who has drained the lees of misunderstanding.

Whistler's fame at large was due to his personality and his pen as much as to his superb achievement in art; yet his instinct in art never faltered, his pen was often at fault.

But his faults were due to his confusion of Art with Craft. The artist fortunately follows

his instincts, not his reason. If what Whistler said of Art be spoken of Craft, then we come nearer to the verities.

All these quarrels of the schools, these "movements," are quarrels of craftsmanship—not of art at all.

What is the ultimate significance of art?

The most vastly interesting thing to man is Life. Whence it comes, whither it goes—these are a part of the eternal mystery. But we can and ought to know all of life 'twixt its coming and its going.

We can only know of life in two ways—either by personal experience or, at second hand, by the transference to us of the experience of our fellows.

Now, our personal adventures

in life, even though we bestride the world like a Napoleon, can at best be but a small and parochial affair, when all's said, as against the multitudinous experience of our generation. Shut off from communion with our fellows we walk but in a blind man's parish. Now we may know of life through our fellows by the transference of their sensations to us—for, just as by Speech we communicate our thoughts to others, so by Art may we communicate our emotions through our senses to their senses, whether by sound, as in music; or the emotional use of words, as in the poetry of verse or prose or oratory; or by the sight, as by colour in painting; or by form, as in sculpture; or by the union of these, as in the drama or archi-

tecture or the like.

Art is the Emotional Statement of Life.

Speech is the intelligent utterance of Thought; Art is the intelligent utterance of emotion. Craft is the grammar of Art —the means by which Art is uttered.

Now, it is not enough to have uttered a Thought to account it Speech; it is vital that the Thought shall be so uttered as to arouse the like thought in the hearer—otherwise are we but in a Babel of Strange Sounds. It is not enough to have uttered Emotion to account it Art; it is vital that the Emotion shall be so uttered as to arouse the like emotion in the onlooker; otherwise are we but in the tangled Whirl of Confusion. And just as

Thought is the more perfectly understood as it is deftly expressed, so is Emotion the more powerfully transmitted as it is most perfectly uttered. Craftsmanship is the perfection or beauty of statement by and through which Art is uttered.

A poker may be a beautiful thing—it is not art. A photograph may be beautiful—it is not art. A woman may be beautiful—she is not art.

Art *must* create—it must transfer Sensation from the creator to us. The Greek genius set up Beauty as the ultimate goal of Life—it therefore set up Beauty as the ultimate goal of Art. The Greeks did really mean that Beauty of Craftsmanship alone was not enough—that Art must *create* Beauty. This absolute aim to achieve Beauty was the

cause of the triumph of Greece in Art—a greatly over-rated triumph when stated against the meaning of life, and one of which the schoolmasters tell us much; it was also the cause of her limitations and of her eventual failure to achieve the supreme mastery, of which we hear little. For, splendid as was the mighty achievement of Greece, she never reached to the majesty and the grandeur of that masterpiece of sculpture that stands upon the edge of Africa, head and shoulders above her achievement, in the wondrous thing that is called the Sphinx. The genius of Egypt spent itself upon the majesty and the mystery of life —and it moved thereby to a higher achievement.

When a school arose, but a

little while ago, that had for its battle-cry the still smaller aim of Art for Art's sake, it really meant that Art was for Craft's sake—that the aim of Art lay solely in the beauty of its Craftsmanship. They would have the play of Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. In the deeps of their confusion, what they said was this: that if a master-hand painted a wall white, by his mastery of trick of thumb he created Art!

Whistler would have us believe that it is the province of Art to say Nothing very Beautifully; his instincts and his genius made no such mistake. He is the master of emotional statement. He said that Art was the Science of the Beautiful—which were no mean definition of Craft, and had been no bad definition of

Art, but that Art is not Science and is not Beauty. It is of the wisdom of the wiseacres who defined a Crab as a scarlet reptile that walks backwards—which were not so bad, had it been a reptile, had it been scarlet, and had it walked backwards.

Art concerns itself with tears and pathos and tragedy and ugliness and greyness and the agonies of life as much as with laughter and comedy and beauty.

Neither Whistler nor another has the right to narrow the acreage of the garden of life. What concern has Shakespeare with Beauty? In the Book that Shakespeare wrote, Beauty is not his god—Beauty is not his ultimate aim. Is jealousy beautiful? Yet *Othello* is great art. Is man's ineffectual strug-

gle against destiny beautiful? Yet *Hamlet* is rightly accounted the masterpiece of the ages. Are hate and despair and fear beautiful? It has been written that Millet's "Killing of a Hog" is beautiful. It is wholly unbeautiful. Had Millet made it beautiful he had uttered the stupidest of lies. Nevertheless, the statement of it may be Art. Indeed, Millet's aim in art, a large part of his significance in art, is a protest against the pettiness of mere beauty. He took the earth, this great-souled man, and he wrought with a master's statement the pathos and the tragedy and the might and the majesty of the earth and of them that toil upon the earth. The "Man with the Hoe" is far more than beautiful—it holds the vast emotions

of man's destiny to labour, and of man's acceptance of that destiny; it utters the ugliness as loudly as it states the beauty of the earth and of toil; and it most rightly utters these things, so that they take equal rank, and thereby add to our knowledge of the emotions of life through the master's power and the beauty of craftsmanship whereby he so solemnly uttered the truth.

Art is not an oil-painting on canvas in a gilt frame. Art is not the exclusive toy of a few prigs—nor the password of a cult. Art is universal, eternal —not parochial. Every man is an artist in his degree—every man is moved by art in his degree. For one act of our day to which we are moved by reason, we are moved to a

score by the emotions — by instinct.

It was exactly in his confusion of Art with Beauty that Whistler fell short of the vastnesses. There are far greater emotions than mere beauty; and it was just in these very majestic qualities, in the sense of the sublime and of the immensities, before which his exquisite and subtle genius stood mute. But at least one of the greater senses was given to him in abundance—the sense of mystery. He never "sucked ideas dry." His splendid instinct told him that suggestion was the soul of craftsmanship, and he never overstated the details of life. Out of the mystic twilight he caught the haunting sense of its half-revelation and its elusiveness with an exquisite emo-

tional use of colour; and in the seeing he caught a glimpse of the hem of the garment of God.

For when all's said, and the last eager craving denied, it is all a mystery, this splendid wayfaring that we call Life; and it is well so, lest the reason reel.

That which is set down in clear fullness; that of which the knowledge is completely exhausted, shall not satisfy the hunger of the imagination—for the imagination leaps beyond it. That which is completely stated, stands out clear and precise; we know the whole tale; it is finished. But that which stands amidst the shadows, with one foot withdrawn, that which is half hid in the mysteries of the unknown, holds the imagination and compels it.

W H I S T L E R

If man once peeped within the half-open door and saw his God, where He sits in His Majesty, though the vision blinded him, his imagination would create a greater. . . .

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